

Testimony Supporting HB 6593

Will Viederman

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Honorable Co-Chairs, Representative Luxenberg and Senator Moore, Vice Chairs Representative Khan and Senator Lesser, and Ranking Members Representative Scott and Senator Sampson; and the entirety of the Housing Committee:

My name is Will Viederman, I am the Housing Policy Manager at Elm City Communities/the Housing Authority of New Haven, and I'm testifying this afternoon in support of H.B. 6593, AN ACT CONCERNING HOUSING AUTHORITY JURISDICTION.

New Haven, the southern Connecticut region, and the state as a whole suffer from a desperate housing shortage. The Connecticut Housing Finance Authority's 2020 Housing Needs Assessment found that our state is short 94,000 homes that are affordable to people making below 30% of their area median income. That same report found that New Haven County alone is short 27,845 units affordable to people making below 30% AMI, and that does not include the 10,780-unit shortage for people in New Haven County making between 31% and 50% of AMI and the 8,430 unit shortage for people in New Haven County making between 51% and 80% of AMI. Open Communities Alliance estimates that our state needs an additional 140,000 affordable housing units. The National Low Income Housing Coalition estimates that our state is short nearly 87,000 affordable housing units.

Regardless of the specific number, our state's housing needs are immense. But Connecticut arbitrarily prevents some of our most effective affordable housing developers from working outside their municipality. Elm City Communities has a long track record of developing high-quality mixed-income and affordable developments, and unlike many other developers we're rooted in our state, with a strong incentive to maintain the quality of life and economic growth of our towns while building a Connecticut that works for all of us. That's not true of many other developers, whose priority is their profit margin. And yet, the state needlessly restricts our ability to help solve our drastic housing shortage.

People living in our cities face enormous housing costs due to the shortage of affordable housing in our state. 64% of Extremely Low-Income people in Connecticut spend more than half of their income on their housing, because there are only 42 affordable units available for every 100 extremely low-income renters. By not building affordable housing, we force low-income people into neighborhoods where, because of decades of discrimination and systematic disinvestment, there are too few resources available to outweigh the immense costs of spending more than half of an already meager income on housing.

In fact, by concentrating poverty in this way, we are constraining our state's collective growth. Hundreds of thousands of people across our state are paying more than they need to in rent or on a mortgage, preventing them from being able to spend that money on college, or a local family business, or at a local restaurant. Furthermore, when we concentrate poverty and restrict the opportunities available to generations of young people in our cities, we are letting down thousands of potential innovators, leaders, and entrepreneurs who, with slightly more institutional support and integration, could help our state grow and thrive. And none of this even considers the simple injustice of constraining an individual's opportunity solely because of arbitrary definitions of who is allowed to develop affordable housing where.

Allowing Public Housing Authorities to operate within an expanded area of jurisdiction would create more naturally affordable housing and encourage integration. Through smart, community-centered planning and development, we can create affordable housing that fits within a town's existing framework, encourages statewide economic growth and development, and offers opportunity to more people.

This bill will help mitigate our state's shortage of affordable housing, improve the prospects for thousands of young people, and strengthen our state's economy in the long term---and it will do so at no cost to the state. I encourage the members of this committee to pass H.B. 6593 and help put our cities, towns, counties, regions, and state on a path to success.